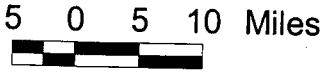
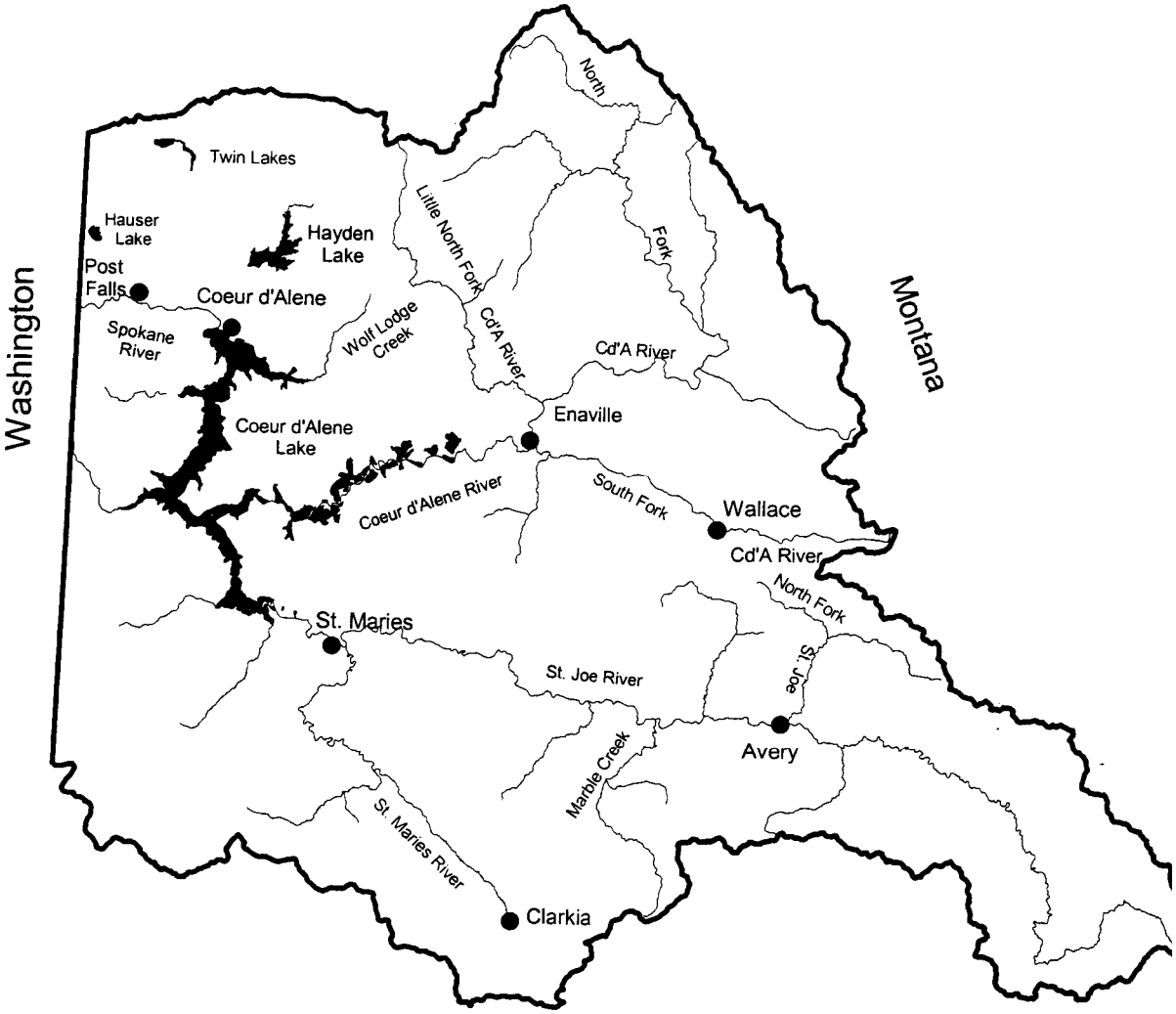
Spokane River Drainage





3. SPOKANE RIVER DRAINAGE

A. Overview

The Spokane River drains about 3,840 square miles in northern Idaho. The major tributaries of the drainage include the St. Joe, St. Maries and Coeur d'Alene rivers which all feed into Coeur d'Alene Lake. Diversity of habitat in the drainage is great. There are many lowland lakes ranging from a few acres to 31,487-acre Coeur d'Alene Lake. Several lakes are close to the major population center and support important urban fisheries. River systems range from small mountain streams to the much larger St. Joe, Coeur d'Alene and Spokane. Mountain lakes are found in the headwaters of the South Fork Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe rivers.

A July 28,1998 decision from the Federal 9th District Court awarded management to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe of the water and fishery resources within the 1873 reservation boundaries. This includes the approximate southern one third of Coeur d'Alene Lake, the southern one half of Black Lake, the lower 20 miles of the St. Joe River, and several major tributaries including Lake, Plummer, Benewah and Evans creeks. The water of Coeur d'Alene Lake within the boundaries of Heyburn State Park, including Hidden, Chatcolet, Round and Benewah lakes was excluded from the court decision, but state versus tribal ownership and management remains unresolved. The Department is working cooperatively with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe to manage fish populations with similar regulations to meet management goals, while reducing angler confusion.

Native game fish in the drainage include westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout and mountain whitefish. The St. Joe, Coeur d'Alene and St. Maries rivers contain populations of resident, river run and lake run cutthroat trout. Historically both the St. Joe and Coeur d'Alene rivers were regarded as among the finest trout streams in America. The upper St. Joe River has regained that status. Both Coeur d'Alene and Hayden lakes were noted for great numbers of large fish often ranging over 5 pounds.

Introduced game species include rainbow trout, kokanee, brook trout, brown trout, splake, chinook salmon, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, pumpkinseed, bluegill and green sunfish, yellow perch, black crappie, brown and black bullhead, channel catfish, tiger muskie and northern pike. A notable fishery for large wild rainbow and a few brown trout is present in the lower Spokane River. Largemouth bass are well established throughout the drainage's lakes. Historically, the area was noted for excellent bass fishing and more recently has seen a tremendous increase in bass fishing pressure. The Coeur d'Alene Lake system has become the focus of several major bass fishing tournaments.

Illegal introductions of northern pike have established populations throughout the Coeur d'Alene Lake system and in Fernan, Hauser, Hayden and Twin lakes. Densities appear to be very low and growth is excellent. Fishing pressure is contributing to low population densities. Attempts to increase northern pike population densities through angling restrictions and enhanced recruitment could result in poorer growth and increase predation on other desirable species such as adfluvial cutthroat trout and bass.

Kokanee have become the dominant species in Coeur d'Alene Lake and are still the most sought after game fish in the region. In 1979, the lake provided a harvest of nearly 600,000 kokanee and supported over 250,000 angler hours of effort. By 1981, however, kokanee numbers increased to the point where food was limited. Kokanee growth slowed and the fishery collapsed when fish became unacceptably small to anglers. Fall chinook salmon were introduced in 1982 to manage the abundance of kokanee. Chinook salmon provided the desired effect on kokanee and created an additional and very popular sport fishery. Kokanee will be managed to maintain a yield fishery for 10-11 inch fish as adults. Chinook will be managed to provide a limited trophy fishery for fish in the three to 18 pound size range, rather than fewer, but larger (25+ pounds) fish. Stable population levels of kokanee and chinook salmon were impacted by large floods in 1996 and 1997. Chinook salmon are successfully reproducing in the system, but numbers have been controlled through removal of surplus redds (fish nests) in some years. Hatchery chinook are used to supplement wild production so more consistent fisheries can be produced in the north end of the lake where most anglers fish, while also maintaining the proper predator/prey balance.

Mining, logging and forest development, highway construction and other land use impacts have taken a major toll on the drainage fisheries. Heavy metal pollution, stream channelization and sedimentation and migration blocks have had an especially severe impact on cutthroat trout. Impoundment of Coeur d'Alene Lake by Post Falls Dam has flooded river sections that were formerly free flowing. Restoration of these trout fisheries or mitigation to replace what was lost will be an important consideration during the FERC relicensing of Post Falls Dam. Increased fishing pressure due to normal population expansion and improved access, and the introduction of competing species have also played an important role in the decline of cutthroat trout. Cutthroat trout stocks in the lake systems currently exist at a fraction of historic levels.

The Spokane system has over 800 miles of streams that are generally accessible to fish for spawning and rearing. The opportunity exists to rely heavily on extensive natural reproduction rather than expensive hatchery facilities to provide better fishing. In 1988, a comprehensive and complex set of regulations were developed to manage primarily for wild native cutthroat trout while still maintaining some limited harvest opportunity for cutthroat and stocked rainbow trout. These regulations were successful in reestablishing a world class fishery for cutthroat in the upper St. Joe River and improving fishing lower in the river. Similar regulations have had limited success in the Coeur d'Alene River drainage where habitat degradation is much worse. The regulations were modified in 2000 to significantly reduce complexity while still protecting and enhancing native cutthroat trout.

Attempts to maintain harvest opportunities for trout in some portion of the Spokane drainage have been met with limited success, however. The productivity of north Idaho waters is low, fish populations are easily over harvested and restrictive regulations are often necessary to allow suitable waters to be adequately stocked with naturally produced fish of desirable size. The demand for harvesting fish exceeds what the wild trout population can supply, so stocked hatchery rainbow trout have been used to supplement wild cutthroat trout production. Despite concentrating hatchery rainbow in limited stretches of river and advertising those areas, the statewide harvest goal of a 40 percent return by number is rarely met. Hatchery rainbow trout also create a source of competition and hybridization with wild cutthroat trout.

Stocking strategies were significantly changed during the last planning period to address concerns. Numbers of stocked fish were reduced by 50% in several areas while stocking in the remaining areas was discontinued. Stocking locations were compressed into the most heavily utilized areas with good road access. Only sterile rainbow trout are used for stocking. Catch out ponds are being built along traditional river fishing areas to replace harvest opportunity. Efforts to completely eliminate all rainbow stocking in rivers will only be achieved when anglers are willing to forgo liberal harvest regulations.

Eight mountain lakes in the Bitterroot range are stocked with trout fry on a rotating basis. Stocking densities have been adjusted to maximize fish growth at a given lake elevation. Only sterile cutthroat and rainbow trout fry are used to stock mountain lakes to reduce potential impacts to native fish populations downstream. Westslope cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, and brook trout are present in most of the stocked lakes, although four lakes are reserved for specialty species, such as grayling and golden trout.

The lakes of the Spokane drainage have supported the bulk of the fisheries in recent years, and other than cutthroat trout stocks, fisheries have been maintained in the face of development. Habitat degradation will continue to take its toll, however, and many lakes are beginning to show habitat problems. Declining water quality and shoreline encroachment are serious problems. Continued rapid development of north Idaho is likely to eliminate future fishery management options.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Manage the Spokane River drainage for wild westslope cutthroat trout.

   Program: Monitor fishing regulations to determine if cutthroat management objectives are being met. Provide harvest opportunity for wild trout within the productive capability of the system.

   Program: Maintain or expand the catch-and-release areas to meet public demand.

   Program: Phase out stocking of put-and-take rainbow trout and develop catch out ponds adjacent to the river to replace lost harvest opportunity.

2. Objective: Minimize impacts of land use and development on fishery habitat in streams.

   Program: Work with the Forest Service, other agencies, private developers and landowners and interested angling groups to make protection of fisheries habitat a primary concern in land use decisions. Incorporate evaluations of existing habitat in survey projects whenever possible. Develop a data base to demonstrate the magnitude of habitat loss and more effectively influence land use decisions. Work with the Forest Service, Department of Transportation, Silver Valley Natural Resource Trustees, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Lands,

   Department of Environmental Quality and others to insure mitigation of habitat loss or restoration of habitat whenever possible.

Program: Participate in the relicensing of the Avista owned Post Falls Dam to insure construction, inundation and operational impacts of the dam are properly mitigated.

3. Objective: Minimize impacts to lake fisheries due to lakeshore encroachment, pollution and nutrient loading.

   Program: Work with county planners and Idaho Department of Lands to make protection of fish habitat and water quality a primary concern in land use decisions.

4. Objective: Improve the efficiency of hatchery put-and-take trout stocking programs.

   Program: Evaluate rate of return, catch rate, and angler use on put-and-take trout fisheries through a routine data collection system.

   Program: Adjust rate, timing or location of trout stocking to improve rate of return to the creel.

   Program: Inform anglers of hatchery supported trout fishing opportunities through maps, brochures, media coverage and signing to improve return to the creel.

   Program: Discontinue put-and-take trout stocking in waters where a 40% or greater by number or 100% or greater by weight return to the creel cannot be met by the end of this planning period. Provide alternative fisheries to maintain angling opportunity.

   Program: Develop and utilize disease free, sterile stocks of rainbow and cutthroat trout to address concerns about potential impacts to wild trout.

5. Objective: Provide diverse angling opportunities in lowland lakes.

   Program: Continue periodic surveys of fish populations to monitor population status and fish growth in relation to physical and biological conditions and fishing regulations. Manage some lakes for specific fish species in order to maximize angling opportunity.

   Program: Maintain maximum harvest opportunity for warmwater species and stocked trout in most lakes while providing quality or trophy management fisheries in a few lakes where biological and physical conditions, and public support provide the right set of conditions for special management.

   Program: Continue maintenance stocking of tiger muskies and channel catfish to maintain popular fisheries. Evaluate channel catfish harvest to determine if harvest restrictions are needed to maintain this hatchery supported fishery. Establish bluegill sunfish in select waters to diversify panfish populations.

6. Objective: Improve fishing and boating access.

   Program: Develop or enhance fishing and boating access areas through easements, cooperative agreements or purchase. Utilize the funds to build fishing docks for shoreline anglers.

7. Objective: Curtail illegal introductions of fish. Illegal introductions of exotic fishes threaten the stability of other established fisheries.

   Program: Develop informational programs to educate anglers and the public to risks of random introductions of exotic species. Through planning, use enforcement efforts to curtail illegal introductions.

DRAINAGE: Spokane River					
Water	Miles/acres	Fishery			Management direction
		Type	Species present	Management	
Coeur d'Alene Lake and minor tributaries (including Chatcolet, Hidden, Benewah and Round lakes)	100/31,487	Mixed	Cutthroat trout	Quality/Wild	Recognize Coeur d'Alene Tribal management of the southern third of Coeur d'Alene Lake. Work with the Tribe to achieve mutual fisheries management objectives in connecting waters. Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Continue to work with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, private landowners and agencies to identify and correct habitat problems on private land, the Interstate 90 corridor, and Forest Service ownership. Maintain the fishing closures on Wolf Lodge, Lake and Benewah creeks to provide maximum recruitment for the Coeur d'Alene Lake fishery.
			Bull trout	Conservation	Maintain harvest closure. Better define bull trout life history patterns in the lake.
			Chinook salmon	Quality	Manage the chinook salmon population at a level that provides greater catches of 3-18 pound fish as opposed to fewer, but larger (20+ pound) fish. Maintain desired population levels with hatchery supplementation and control of wild chinook salmon recruitment.
			Kokanee Rainbow trout Brook trout	General	Manage the kokanee population at a level that provides a yield fishery for 10-11 inch adult fish and forage for chinook salmon.
			Largemouth bass Smallmouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Bluegill Pumpkinseed Bullhead Channel catfish	General	Maintain consumptive fisheries on warmwater species to provide yield fisheries while reducing potential predation and competition impacts on adfluvial cutthroat trout. Maintain northern pike population densities at low levels with liberal harvest regulations to maintain rapid growth rates while reducing predation on other species. Channel catfish may persist in the Coeur d'Alene Lake system during this planning period due to historic stocking of channel catfish in the lower St. Joe and St. Maries rivers, but there is no known natural reproduction occurring.

Hayden Lake And tributaries	20/3,756	Mixed	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Splake Smallmouth bass Largemouth bass Black crappie Northern pike Yellow perch Pumpkinseed Bullhead	Quality Quality General	Maintain a quality trout fishery with hatchery supplementation of rainbow and cutthroat fingerlings. Evaluate size and timing of fingerling releases to maximize survival. Evaluate stock differences between rainbow trout to determine what stock will best meet angler desires. Maintain tributary closures and a trout harvest season on the lake to maximize wild trout production. Evaluate growth and return to the creel of splake (lake trout/brook trout hybrid). Provide high catch rates for better than average size fish with regulations that reduce, but do not eliminate harvest. Evaluate bass and crappie population structure and fishery to determine if the regulations are meeting management goals. Encourage maximum harvest of northern pike to reduce impacts to other fish populations.
Upper and Lower Twin lakes	/850	Mixed	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Brook trout Largemouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Pumpkinseed Green sunfish Bullhead	Put-and-take trout General	Stock put-and-take rainbow trout and fingerling cutthroat trout to provide consumptive trout fishery. Limit rainbow trout stocking in Upper Twin Lake to early spring only while water temperature is suitable. Stock cutthroat fingerlings in Lower Twin Lake. Maintain harvest-oriented fisheries for warmwater species.
Fernan Lake	/300	Mixed	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Largemouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Pumpkinseed Bullhead Channel catfish	Put-and-take trout General General	Stock put-and-take rainbow trout and fingerling cutthroat trout to provide a consumptive trout fishery. Manage bass for the consumptive angler by allowing the harvest of any size bass. Enhance the diversity of the warmwater fishery in Fernan Lake with maintenance stocking of channel catfish.
Hauser Lake	/550	Mixed	Rainbow trout Cutthroat trout Tiger muskie Largemouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Pumpkinseed Green sunfish Bullhead Channel catfish	Put-and-take trout General Trophy General	Stock put-and-take rainbow trout and fingerling cutthroat trout to provide consumptive trout fishery. Maintain tiger muskie stocking to provide a specialized trophy fishery. Enhance the diversity of the warmwater fishery in Hauser Lake with maintenance stocking of channel catfish.

Lateral Lakes (Anderson, Thompson, Blue, Swan, Medicine, Cave, Black, Bull Run, and Rose lakes) and slackwater portions of the Coeur d'Alene River	/2,960	Warmwater	Largemouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Bluegill Pumpkinseed Bullhead Channel catfish	Trophy/Quality/General General	Manage Blue Lake for trophy bass, Anderson Lake for quality bass, and maintain general bass regulations on the other lakes. Manage the majority of lakes for year-round consumptive fisheries on warmwater species. Maintain northern pike population densities at low levels to maintain rapid growth while reducing predation on bass and cutthroat trout. Enhance the diversity of the warmwater fishery by maintenance stocking of channel catfish in Rose Lake.
North Fork Coeur d'Alene River and tributaries above and including Yellow Dog Creek and Little North Fork Coeur d□Alene River and tributaries above and including Laverne Creek	200/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout	Quality	Maintain catch-and-release regulations to maximize catch rates and fish size and provide fish for harvest downstream from catch-and-release waters.
North Fork Coeur d'Alene River below Yellow Dog Creek, Little North Fork Coeur d□Alene River below Laverne Creek and South Fork Coeur d'Alene River	105/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Bull trout Rainbow trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish Kokanee Chinook salmon	Quality Conservation Put-and-take trout General	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Evaluate the effectiveness of the regulations at enhancing cutthroat trout populations and providing desired angling opportunities during this planning period. Consider additional areas for catch-and-release rules. Investigate distribution, status and critical habitat needs to better guide conservation efforts. Phase out or significantly reduce rainbow trout stocking during this planning period. Utilize only sterile rainbow trout to minimize impacts to native cutthroat trout. Concentrate rainbow trout stocking in specific locations that are well-advertised and easy for anglers to access to maximize catch rates. Provide harvest opportunity for stocked rainbow trout in catch-out ponds located near traditional harvest areas. Maintain existing harvest fisheries on brook trout and mountain whitefish. Allow harvest of chinook salmon in the lower river with similar regulations as the lake.
Tributaries of the mainstem North Fork and South Fork Coeur d'Alene rivers that are outside catch-and-release boundaries	300+/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Brook trout	Quality General	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows populations to increases while providing limited harvest opportunity.

Slackwater area of the Coeur d'Alene River	35/	Mixed	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish Chinook salmon Largemouth bass Yellow perch Bullhead	Quality General	Work with Avista during relicensing of Post Falls Dam to enhance fish habitat that has been negatively impacted by dam operations. Work with EPA, DEQ, other state and local agencies, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, mining companies and individuals to reduce impacts to the aquatic community and resource users from mining related activities.
St. Joe River and tributaries above Avery	200+/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Bull trout	Quality Conservation	Maintain catch-and-release regulations to maximize catch rates and fish size and recruit fish for harvest downstream from catch-and-release waters. Investigate distribution, status, and critical habitat needs to better guide conservation efforts.
St. Joe River below Avery	90/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Bull trout Rainbow trout Mountain whitefish	Quality Conservation Put-and-take trout General	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Evaluate the effectiveness of the regulations at enhancing cutthroat trout populations and providing desired angling opportunities during this planning period. Investigate distribution, status and critical habitat needs to better guide conservation efforts. Phase out or significantly reduce rainbow trout stocking during this planning period. Utilize only sterile rainbow trout to minimize impacts to native cutthroat trout. Concentrate rainbow trout stocking in specific locations that are well-advertised and easy for anglers to access to maximize catch rates. Provide harvest opportunity for stocked rainbow trout in catch-out ponds located near traditional harvest areas. Maintain existing liberal harvest fisheries for mountain whitefish.
Tributaries of the St. Joe River below Avery	300+/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Brook trout	Quality General	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity.
Slackwater area of St. Joe River	14/	Mixed	Cutthroat trout Largemouth bass Black crappie Yellow perch Bullhead	Quality General	Recognize Coeur d'Alene Tribal management of the slackwater portion of the St. Joe River. Work with the Tribe to meet Tribal and state management objectives in connecting waters. Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Work with the Tribe and Avista during relicensing of Post Falls Dam to enhance fish habitat that has been negatively impacted by dam operations.

St. Maries River above slackwater	150/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout	Quality	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Consider managing a section of river with catch-and-release regulations.
			Bull trout	Conservation	Investigate distribution, status and critical habitat needs to better guide conservation efforts.
			Rainbow trout	Put-and-take trout	Phase out or significantly reduce rainbow trout stocking during this planning period. Utilize only sterile rainbow trout to minimize impacts to native cutthroat trout. Concentrate rainbow trout stocking in specific locations that are well-advertised and easy for anglers to access to maximize catch rates. Provide harvest opportunity for stocked rainbow trout in catch-out ponds located near traditional harvest areas.
			Brook trout Mountain whitefish	General	Maintain existing harvest fisheries for brook trout and mountain whitefish.
Tributaries of the St. Maries River	200+/	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout	Quality	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity.
			Brook trout	General	Allow continued liberal harvest of brook trout.
Slackwater area of the St. Maries River	9/	Mixed	Cutthroat trout	Quality	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity.
			Largemouth bass Black crappie Yellow perch Bullhead	General	Maintain consumptive harvest fishing opportunity for warmwater species. Work with Avista during relicensing of Post Falls Dam to enhance fish habitat that has been negatively impacted by dam operations.
Spokane River (Coeur d'Alene Lake to Post Falls Dam)	15/	Mixed	Cutthroat trout	Quality	Utilize a slot limit for westslope cutthroat trout that allows the population to increase while providing limited harvest opportunity. Evaluate the effectiveness of the regulations at enhancing cutthroat trout populations and providing desired angling opportunities during this planning period.
			Largemouth bass Northern pike Black crappie Yellow perch Pumpkinseed Bullhead	General	Maintain consumptive harvest fishing opportunity for warmwater species.
Spokane River (Post Falls Dam downstream to stateline)	6/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brown trout	Wild	Determine what opportunities exist to enhance both size and catch rates for rainbow trout through habitat enhancement and regulations. Evaluate population dynamics and limitations. Work with Avista during relicensing of Post Falls Dam to enhance fish habitat that has been negatively impacted by dam operations.
Alpine Lakes (8 in the Spokane River drainage)	/140	Coldwater	Cutthroat trout Rainbow trout Brook trout Golden trout Grayling	General	Continue maintenance stocking of trout fry to provide fisheries that are consistent with lake productivity and angler pressure. Use westslope cutthroat trout for cutthroat trout stocking and sterile disease-free rainbow trout. Reserve some lakes for specialty fish (golden trout and grayling) only. Do not stock lakes that are currently fishless in order to maintain some natural alpine lakes.